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ABSTRACT

The author purports the need to treat moral education as a serious academic subject and suggests ways educators can manage it in an intellectually defensible way. Ethical education must avoid indoctrination, yet it should not be a mere training in philosophical ethics. The domain of moral education should include four partially interdependent goals. The goals are (1) to teach children what are and are not moral phenomena, (2) to teach children the role of morality in the development of the personality and in the organization of society, (3) to help children to become aware of their own values, and (4) to train children to consider the moral consequences of their own actions. These goals must then be adapted to the kinds of issues most relevant at the particular point in the child's life. Much research remains to be done in the field of moral instruction. Most crucial is the area of early education programs for "disadvantaged" children, which would be directed toward moral, as distinguished from cognitive, education. Other vital areas for future research are: the design of measures of moral development both reliable and sensitive to change; the instruction of teenagers, as potential parents, in how to teach moral education themselves; the establishment of criteria for selection of teachers of moral education; and the instruction of these teachers in how to teach it. (Author/MK)

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Research Considerations in Ethical Education

by

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I am somewhat reluctant to comment on research needs in moral education, and properly so. I am an academic psychologist untrained in either philosophy or curriculum development and evaluation; in trying to comment on research needs in a substantive area of education, I stand a very real chance of merely rediscovering the wheel. Furthermore, my own theoretical affinities are closely aligned with traditional (or old fashioned) depth psychology. In this tradition a large part of people's values and moral beliefs are thought to be unconscious, and moral development is regarded as part and parcel of personality development broadly considered. Since education is primarily directed toward changing conscious cognitive structures and since unconscious personality dispositions are hard to modify by rational persuasion, there is a significant discontinuity between my preferred theoretical modus operandi and that of most educators. Finally, the subject of moral education is very complex; many of the traditional problems of political theory and social philosophy are related to moral education and one ventures into this area at great risk. My primary defense is that in being a relative newcomer to

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this enterprise I may be less fettered by the conventional wisdom of the subject, and possibly able to see things in a different perspective.

The logical starting point for this discussion is to try to specify the appropriate domain of moral education. Actually it is a good deal easier to say what is not in the domain. There is substantial consensus first of all that moral education must avoid anything that smacks of advocacy, indoctrination, political preference, and special pleading. Nonetheless, people's moral beliefs are so personally important and deeply involving that their private values are likely to influence their discussions of morality no matter how hard they try to be objective. This consideration puts a heavy burden on teachers in particular because it is tantamount to saying that moral education must be, in a peculiar way, content free.

Moral education can't be indoctrination, but it probably shouldn't be training in philosophical ethics either. This is so for several reasons. For one, education in moral philosophy is largely training in a methodology (i.e., how to use a moral vocabulary). As such this form of education has no substantive or empirical content; in addition we surely mean more by moral education than teaching children how correctly to use words such as "good," "right," and "just." Second, as anyone who has taken an undergraduate philosophy course knows, it is extraordinarily difficult to find persons who can teach ethics effectively. Third, courses in moral philosophy will simply bore most

children.

What then should moral education entail? The following four goals represent a distillation of the views on the subject that I have encountered over the last ten years. One goal, it seems to be, is to teach children what are and are not moral phenomena. I was forcibly impressed with this problem during my graduate student days at U.C. Berkeley. That period (1964-1967) corresponded to the beginnings of the war protest movement. That which I found most disturbing about the Berkeley Free Speech and anti-war movements was the amount of nonsense spoken in the name of morality. For example, there were a number of sound reasons for opposing the Vietnamese war, most of which could be framed in terms of national self-interest. But the most frequent criticism of the war--that it was immoral--was nonsensical and revealed a deep confusion about the necessary preconditions for a moral discussion. As Hall and Davis (1975, p.17) observe, "When people who hold different moral beliefs disagree about what behavior ought to be allowed or disallowed in their society, the crisis is a social or political one; when people who hold definite moral principles or values fail to put these ideals into practice, the crisis is a psychological or spiritual one; but when people don't know what values or principles they hold or how to apply these moral ideals to specific situations, the crisis is a moral one." At Berkeley in the late 1960's there was a moral crisis, but it was quite different from what the students suspected.

A second goal of moral education, it seems to me, is teaching children about the role of morality in the development of personality and in the organization of society. This is a perfectly straightforward problem in social studies education; it is a subject that has empirical and non-ideological content deriving from recent research in anthropology and developmental psychology. We taught this subject matter at Johns Hopkins with good effect in our experimental enrichment curricula for verbally gifted adolescents (cf. Hogan, et al, in press). Such a curriculum has important intellectual content but its side effects are also salubrious. For example, psychologists in their professional roles as secular intellectuals regard religion as a kind of superstitious ignorance that should be eliminated (this despite the fact that they often revert to conventional piety on the weekends thereby manifesting a private form of schizophrenia). With the exception of William James' masterpiece "The Varieties of Religious Experience," the psychology of religion is regarded with considerable professional distaste. In view of the fact that humans have practiced some form of organized religious activity for at least 70,000 years, perhaps psychology should drop its prejudice and begin treating the topic with more sympathy (see also Campbell, 1976).

A second valuable side effect associated with classroom discussions of the functions of morality is to clarify the uses of ethnicity. The official American myth has long been that the U.S. is a melting pot. More recently however, social scientists have begun to argue that a

portion of the rootlessness, anomie, and civil unrest that seems endimic in American society is attributable to the breakdown of the extended family, the building block of ethnic identity. The spontaneous interest in this subject as reflected in, for example, Black Studies programs, testifies to depth of the felt need. But it is equally apparent that the subject must be handled in a more substantive way if it is to have any intellectual credibility.

Finally, by encouraging a dispassionate examination of the functions of morality in personal development and social organization, it may be possible to foster a degree of tolerance for divergent moral, religious, and ethnic views. This tolerance leads to a breakdown in parochial alligences, and promotes the perspective that one's own values are merely one set among many. One of the most important moral lessons for anyone to learn is the relativity of values, the fact that others won't necessarily agree with one's own definition of right and wrong. This commonplace of moral relativism is the stock and trade of Anthropology and one of the easiest lessons for sophomores to master. It is both vital and something that must ultimately be overcome. That is, one aspect of moral maturity is the willingness autonomously to defend one's values, yet at the same time tolerate the values of others. This entails mastering and transcending the lesson of relativism.

A third goal of moral education consists of aiding a child in becoming aware of his or her own values. The process of helping people to become aware of their unconsciously held values and preconceptions

is a traditional goal of both depth psychology and education broadly considered. The values clarification people and the human potential movement have been greatly interested in this aspect of moral education. Although I agree with the values clarification movement that one should be clear about one's moral preconceptions, I disagree in two other respects. On the one hand I don't believe that simply being aware of one's values will necessarily enhance personal development. On the other hand, I don't believe that all values are equally valuable--people can unconsciously subscribe to values that they ought to be ashamed of. This points up the importance of the first goal of moral education--learning to recognize the distinguishing features of a moral phenomena.

A fourth goal of moral education is to train children to consider the moral consequences of their actions. Once again this goal builds on the achievements of the preceding tasks: learning to recognize moral problems; learning how morality structures social relations; and becoming aware of one's own values. The capacity and disposition to consider the moral consequences of one's actions represents a further breakdown in the egocentrism of childhood. It is also a more complex and demanding intellectual chore than merely recognizing moral problems and tolerating alternative perspectives. It requires an earnest consideration of the perspectives of others and of the immediate and long range implications of one's actions; it demands an active and energetic searching of behavioral options and alternatives. Obviously

this cognitive disposition is related to political maneuvering and such a disposition will serve the ends of a psychopath as well as a saint. Nonetheless, it seems to be an important component of moral education.

These four aspects of moral education seem practical, non-ideological, and capable of being taught without doing partisan indoctrination at the same time. However, there is an important qualification that must be appended to the foregoing, and that involves the well-known concept of "readiness." The notion of readiness assumes a developmental progression in psychological growth; specifically, it requires that instructional methods be tailored to the capacities of students at different developmental periods. In principle this is a sensible scheme; the problem is in identifying the nature of the different periods.

Most educational and developmental psychologists today adopt some version of the cognitive-developmental model originally proposed by Jean Piaget. In the Piagetian model the critical transition in cognitive development is from concrete to formal operations. Mature moral thought is considered possible only for those children who are also capable of formal operational thinking. The capacity for formal operations is the prerequisite for mature moral pondering. This assumption, endorsed by virtually every developmentalist of note, puts me in an embarrassing position because I find it untenable. I can only briefly outline my objections to this Piagetian assumption because a critique of the view is beyond the purview of the present paper. First of all, the distinction

between concrete and formal operations parallels the hoary distinction between concrete and abstract modes of thought. But the concrete-abstract dichotomy on closer analysis can't be rigorously maintained on either conceptual or empirical grounds (possibly because it doesn't correspond to any process in the mind). For example, the poetic device of synecdoche is simultaneously both very concrete and highly abstract. Similarly, utterances taken out of context can't be classified as concrete or abstract; and both of these examples point up the relativity of the distinction.

Second, as the existentialists have argued, moral decisions have nothing to do with abstractions; rather, they have to do with the actual and immediate problems of real people in specific situations. To think about these problems in the abstract can be deeply pathological because it means on the one hand that one can avoid confronting the problems directly--thinking abstractly is a psychological distancing mechanism--and, on the other hand, by thinking about moral problems abstractly, one dehumanizes the actors involved. A third reason for objecting to the concrete-abstract distinction is that it is confounded with IQ. As Keating (1975) has convincingly shown, indices of the capacity for formal operations are operationally indistinguishable from indices of IQ. And surely we don't want to argue that IQ is a prerequisite for moral maturity.

Finally, the widespread acceptance of the validity of the concrete-abstract distinction in cognitive development seems to me to reflect one more triumph of French culture in a civilization that seems to have lost

its self-confidence. From Descartes to the present the distinguishing feature of French rationalism and/or structuralism has been the tendency to build obsessively elaborate formal intellectual models designed to represent selected aspects of nature, but models that are so "abstract" that they rarely if ever come into contact with the world. But their attractiveness has never depended on their empirical merits; rather the appeal of these models rests on their logical orderliness, their inclusiveness, their universality--all aesthetic considerations primarily valued by academicians and intellectuals. This of course contrasts at every point with the major themes in Anglo-American philosophy with its pragmatic, empirical, and practical orientation. Whatever the strengths and weaknesses of these competing views, it is important to recognize that French rationalism or structuralism is every bit as parochial as American behaviorism. Nonetheless, concerning the degree to which American psychology has gone in for French rationalism, one can only imagine Charles DeGaulle smiling in his grave.

What, then, is the critical readiness factor in moral education? Drawing on the lessons of depth psychology, it seems reasonable to suppose that children's moral instruction whould be geared to kinds of issues that are most relevant at that point in their lives. (Elsewhere (Hogan, 1975, Hogan & Mills, 1976) I have argued that moral development can be conceptualized in terms of certain archetypal problems in development. Thus, during ages 0 to 5 children are largely concerned with learning language and the other arbitrary but vitally important rules of

their culture; during this time moral problems largely involve relations with authority. From 6 to 16 children are preoccupied with peer group status; here moral problems revolve around peer relations and the problems of justice defined in terms of fairness. From 0 to 5 the child must learn to live with authority; from 6 to 16 it must learn to live with other people; after 16, however, it must learn to live with itself. This means developing autonomous guidelines for conduct. These guidelines will usually be framed in terms of a pre-existing religious, political, historical, or philosophical world view--an ideology.

In a nutshell, then, this model suggests that young children need to learn about rules and authority, older children need to learn about social expectations and the concept of fairness, and adolescents need to develop an ideological frame work that gives structure and coherence to their moral education.

We have talked so far about certain reasonable goals for moral education and the problem of readiness. All this was, I believe, necessary in order to set the stage for discussing future research needs in moral education. Avenues of research in this field are almost infinite. But one area where research is probably not needed is in the evaluation of the effects of moral education per se. Such research would not be helpful because we can safely predict that it won't yield any results. Trying to evaluate the effects of moral education is like trying to evaluate the effects of education in general. It requires a kind of longitudinal investigation that no one has the time or patience to do,

and it can't get funded in any case. But perhaps more importantly, the Character Education Inquiry of Hartshorne and May gave a pretty clear indication of what the results are likely to be. Thus, the path of wisdom in moral education research may be simply to assume that it is desirable in and of itself, that its positive effects can be somehow taken for granted, that it is necessary and important on its face. This clears the way to concentrate on other features of moral education.

There are five areas of research in moral education that seem particularly pressing and important at this point in our educational history. The first of these I regard as the most crucial. Although some psychologists have recently questioned the notion that early experience is critical for later development, it is hard to believe that human development represents a major exception to one of the most fundamental regularities in biology. If we can assume that children come into the world ready to absorb and then use culture, then moral education should have its greatest impact on the youngest children. Practically speaking those children in greatest need of moral education are those from families who feel alienated or estranged from the mainstream of our culture. These families are typically referred to as disadvantaged. There has been a sizable effort made to enrich the early cognitive development of disadvantaged children in terms of programs falling under the general title of Project Headstart. There has also been a sizable effort made to evaluate the effects of Project

Headstart itself, which effects have been routinely assessed in terms of changes in IQ scores. But there is solid evidence to indicate that classroom performance and persistance in school are as related to attitudes toward authority as they are to IQ scores. More importantly, these attitudes ought to be more easily modified than IQ scores. It seems to me, then, that one vital area for research in moral education is to evaluate the consequences of existing Headstart programs for their impact on moral as distinguished from cognitive development. At the same time it should be useful to begin developing early education programs designed explicitly to foster moral development. I don't want to speculate on the content of the various programs; rather I want only to make the point that a version of Project Headstart directed toward moral education would have the same or possibly a greater impact on academic performance than the original version, but it would in addition hit at the roots of delinquency--a problem not soluble by cognitively oriented educational treatment.

A second research topic that has long been ignored is designing measures of moral development that are simultaneously reliable yet sensitive to change. There seems to be an inherent tradeoff between reliability as defined in classical test theory and measures that are sensitive to change. There is nothing about the mathematics of reliability estimation that makes this true, rather it seems to be an empirical truism. The problem is, I am sure, soluble if it is given the requisite attention.

A third area of research concerns how to teach teenagers to teach moral education. Teenagers are the next generation of parents. If the family in America has broken down, and if adults are no longer sure of their values, and if morality is no longer being effectively taught in the home, and if the schools are going to become involved in moral education, then a number of social ills can be addressed simultaneously by self-consciously preparing late adolescents for one of the most important tasks of adulthood. That is, educators can begin to fill the gap in the process of cultural transmission by teaching potential parents how to teach morality. And as was discussed above, this can be done in a non-ideological, non-doctrinaire manner that is consistent with the basic but sometimes inarticulate values of the American public.

A fourth area of research that follows from all the foregoing concerns how to select teachers to do moral education. This only becomes a researchable topic if one accepts the view that it is reasonable for teachers to specialize, and that some people are more effective at transmitting certain materials than others. In many, if not most, academic settings this will be a useless distinction because budget limitations will dictate staff size. Still, it is useful to consider how, in principle, one would select teachers who are particularly well suited to do moral education.

The final avenue of research concerns how to teach teachers to do moral education. As this symposium suggests, moral education is

both too broad and yet in some ways too specialized to be done effectively by, for example, simply providing social studies teachers with two or three lesson plans. Teacher preparation in this area should be taken as seriously as it is in any other standard academic subject.

Moral education is a vitally important topic, and the fact that it is being taken seriously after all these years reflects a recent change in the zeitgeist of American education. But we educators must approach the subject carefully, critically, and analytically to insure that it is handled in an intellectually defensible manner, and that we don't leave ourselves open to the charges of propagandizing for our own particular political biases. The task is as difficult as it is important.

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